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SOME EXPLODED THEORIES CONCERNING SOUTHWESTERN ARCHEOLOGY

By U. FRANCIS DUFF

Since the beginning of systematic investigation in regard to the archeological and ethnological problems of the southwestern portion of the United States, many theories — or perhaps I should say guesses — concerning them have been exploded.

Among these iridescent dreams and wild imaginings, born of fancy and a very limited knowledge of the subject, may be mentioned the exaggerated estimates of early population. In this, misled by the great number of ruins of pueblos, cliff-dwellings, and cave lodges, the exuberant genius of the observer has had full sway. Some have declared the population ran into the millions. One writer, who had made an investigation of the remains in the valley of the Rio Verde in Arizona, estimated the number of people once occupying it as having been a million and a half, which is, in all probability, twenty-five or thirty times the number of Indians ever existing at any one time in the territory now covered by New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, and Utah combined.

For many and various reasons the sedentary Indians of the Southwest changed the location of their homes very frequently. This might have been the result of disease, of a failure of water, scarcity of game, or other cause. A great many changes were no doubt the result of sickness, for when an epidemic begins its ravages, the primitive intelligence of the Indian instantly attaches to it some superstitious significance, and his most available remedy is to flee from it. One may therefore imagine what a ruinous mass a many-storied pueblo, consisting frequently of hundreds of rooms, and without even the semblance of sanitary protection, would become in the course of years. To avoid total destruction on the breaking out of a contagious disease, prompt removal to another site would be a necessity. Long drought in any one part of the country might produce the same result, and no doubt often did so. There

are but two inhabited pueblos in the entire Southwest — Acoma and Isleta — that are now on the sites which they occupied at the time of Coronado's *entrada* in 1540. Many pueblos were abandoned also through missionary influence, the missionaries aiming at a policy of concentration in order that they could administer to them more easily. The Pueblo revolt in 1680 resulted in the desertion of practically all the Indian towns, and the nomad tribes, through constant depredation on their more peaceful neighbors, frequently caused the latter to abandon their villages and move to other sites. This constant changing of location, probably for ages before the historical period began, accounts, in part at least, for the large number of ruins scattered throughout the valleys and mountain ranges of the Southwest.

Charles F. Lummis, the able investigator of our southwestern country, asserts that "the Pueblos never counted 30,000 souls." This is the figure also given by A. F. Bandelier and practically agreed to by Cosmos Mindeleff in the *Thirteenth Annual Report* of the Bureau of American Ethnology. The Pueblo population of the region in 1903, according to the report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, is less than 10,000.

Another popular fallacy is the belief that the cliff-dwellers and the pueblo or village Indians were distinct and separate races. No doubt the cliff-dweller originally lived in villages situated in the valleys or on the mesas, and was driven to occupy the great natural cavities in the sides of the chasms that here scar the land, simply because they offered a greater degree of security against marauding tribes than did the more exposed type of habitation. On investigation it appears that many of the centers of cliff occupancy had other villages in connection with them, situated either in the lowlands along usually near-by streams, or on adjacent heights. While these eyries might have offered other inducement to their occupants, it evidently was safety, or at least a reasonable degree of security, that caused them to put themselves to the endless labor of getting their supplies up the faces of the almost appalling cliffs in which many of their homes were built.

Some have ventured the assertion, which has been believed by many uninformed persons, that the cliff-dweller was a dwarf, basing

the statement on the fact that the doors of their dwellings are seldom more than three or four feet high and relatively narrow. This mode of construction was a most natural one, for a low door, which would put an invader to the necessity of stooping to enter, could be more easily defended than a large one, and would be better protection from severe weather. An examination of the human remains found in the cliff-dwellings proves conclusively that the inhabitants of these lofty abodes were people of ordinary size, and that they were no more dwarfs than were the mound-builders giants.

In view of the facts mentioned, it is scarcely worth while to discuss the theories of the advocates of a belief in a former vast population in the prehistoric Southwest — such as that the people were entirely swept away by some great pestilence, that they migrated in a body, or that they were driven out by fumes emanating from volcanic eruptions.

While traditions of migrations exist among all the tribes, many of the latter probably being made up of accretions from other tribes, as in the case of the Navaho and the Hopi, there is no evidence whatever that any great exodus has occurred.

The dead are not found scattered promiscuously through the ruins, but, almost without exception, are observed to have been laid away with the usual rites. This fact would also preclude the possibility of any great massacre having taken place.

Bandelier mentions what has, beyond question, been a potent means of decrease in the population — the constant inter-killing in the tribes on the charge of being possessed of evil spirits and of practising witchcraft. Sorcery, indeed, is practised even at the present time, as recorded by Mr Lummis and others, and as the records of the civil courts of New Mexico show. Intertribal wars and wars with the Spaniards have been even more disastrous.

It has even recently been stated in print, with a view of substantiating a belief in the great antiquity of southwestern occupancy, that ears of corn embedded in lava have been taken from ruins in central New Mexico. This apparently lavafied corn has more likely resulted from the destruction of the village or villages by fire, certain of the materials of which the walls were composed vitrifying through the intense heat of the burning

timbers and running over the corn stored in some of the rooms of the structure.¹

The "Gran Quivira" myth to the effect that the place was the depository of vast wealth, was long ago exploded by Bandelier, and later in a popular article by Mr Lummis, published in *Scribner's Magazine* for April, 1893, afterward reprinted in his delightful volume, *The Land of Poco Tiempo*.

At different times reports of finds of gold in southwestern ruins have been circulated, but the best information later obtainable tended only to disprove them. Nor have any precious stones been discovered, aside from turquoise beads and ornaments, of which those found in Pueblo Bonito, in Chaco cañon, by Mr G. H. Pepper of the Hyde Expedition, are the most noteworthy.

Science demands only facts, and it is well that all adventitious and extraneous matter—the cobwebs of tradition and the crude imaginings of the ill-informed—should be swept away. In this work Messrs A. F. Bandelier, Charles F. Lummis, and those connected with the Bureau of American Ethnology at Washington have been widely recognized factors, and it may now be said that, largely through their efforts, southwestern archeology and ethnology have been placed on a scientific basis.

¹Owing to the belief prevalent in the Southwest, especially in central and western New Mexico, of the existence of pueblo ruins within the great lava flow in the vicinity of Mount Taylor (locally called San Mateo), I made a special investigation of the question in 1897 and 1899, pursuing every clue encountered and finally tracing the origin of the myth to a cowboy, residing in the vicinity of San Rafael, near Grant Station, on the Santa Fé Pacific Railroad. This individual, it was asserted, while rounding-up stray cattle in *malpais*, had seen the ruins, the walls of which were of stone, and that the lava had poured in the door and window openings. When I offered to reward him handsomely if he would take me to the spot, he denied having seen any ruins of the character mentioned, nor was I able to obtain more definite information from four local surveyors who had traversed the country during many years. Later search resulted only in the discovery—within the limits of the once molten stream, to be sure,—of some rude stone walls that had been constructed at a period long subsequent to the flow and at points not actually touched by it. Encrusted corn, such as that mentioned by Professor Duff, has been found in several localities in New Mexico, but there is little doubt that the incrustation consists not of lava but of slag from the immense communal ovens, such as those uncovered by the Hemenway Expedition in the Salado valley of Arizona. — EDITOR.